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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 SARAJEVO 001324

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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ALEXANDER  
VERSHBOW'S ATTENDANCE AT THE ADRIATIC CHARTER MINISTERIAL

Classified By: DCM Jonathan Moore for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. ASD Vershbow attended the Adriatic Charter Defense Ministerial in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina on November 18. Vershbow reiterated U.S. support for Bosnia's and Montenegro's NATO aspirations and stressed that the U.S. supported NATO membership for Macedonia as soon as a mutually acceptable solution of the name issue could be reached. He stressed that regional cooperation must involve sharing knowledge and expertise, as well as combined training and deployment, and asserting collective leadership on necessary reforms. A5 members expressed support for Bosnia's and Montenegro's MAP applications and reiterated their support for NATO's "open door" policy. A5 Ministers affirmed the critical importance of regional defense cooperation and signed a joint statement to enhance regional cooperation by establishing three regional training centers in the Western Balkans.

¶2. (C) On the Margins of the Ministerial, ASD Vershbow held bilateral meetings with Bosnia's MoD Selmo Cikotic, Serbia's MoD Dragan Sutanovac and Croatian State Secretary of Defense Pjer Simunovic. During the meeting with Bosnian MoD Cikotic, the MAP issue dominated the conversation, with Cikotic arguing that granting MAP to Bosnia at the December NATO Ministerial would be the only way to support pro-reform elements in Bosnia and repudiate those who seek to undermine reform efforts. Vershbow stressed that though MAP for Bosnia was a matter of "when," not "whether," Bosnia nonetheless needed to implement certain reforms before the U.S. would support its MAP application. During his meeting with the ASD, MoD Sutanovac raised Serbia's desire to see changes to the Military Technical Agreement (MTA)-imposed ground safety zone, as well as Serbia's increased contribution to international operations and intention to open its NATO liaison office in Brussels prior to the end of 2009. END SUMMARY.

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Adriatic Charter Ministerial  
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¶3. (U) The fifth Adriatic Charter Defense Ministerial, and the first since Bosnia and Montenegro became members, was hosted by Bosnia's Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic and attended by A5 members Albanian Deputy Defense Minister Arian Starova, Croatian State Secretary of Defense Pjer Simunovic, Macedonian Defense Minister Zoran Konjanovski and Montenegrin Defense Minister Boro Vucinic -- plus Slovenian Defense Minister Ljubica Jelisic (guest) and Serbian Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac (observer).

¶4. (U) In his opening remarks, ASD Vershbow reiterated U.S. support for Bosnia's and Montenegro's NATO aspirations and

stressed that the U.S. supported NATO membership for Macedonia as soon as a mutually acceptable solution on the name issue could be reached. He stated that regional cooperation must involve sharing knowledge and expertise, as well as combined training and deployment, and that Charter members must assert collective leadership on necessary reforms.

15. (U) A5 members expressed support for Bosnia's and Montenegro's MAP applications and reiterated their support for NATO's "open door" policy. Defense Ministers affirmed the critical importance of regional defense cooperation and the continued relevance of the Adriatic Charter as the only regional forum focused specifically on NATO membership; they also stressed the need to avoid duplication of efforts with initiatives such as the Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial. Croatia and Albania shared lessons from the NATO accession process, and members agreed that increased regional stability and cooperation would facilitate increased contributions to ISAF and other out-of-area operations. Macedonia affirmed that, despite the disappointment of not being invited into NATO, it will continue to pursue defense reforms and plans to strengthen its contribution to ISAF as well as maintain its contribution to the EU's Operation Althea in Bosnia. Montenegro called for common solutions on surplus ammunitions and Slovenia appealed for cooperation on natural disaster response.

16. (U) The Adriatic Charter Defense Ministers signed a joint statement on enhancing regional cooperation by establishing regional centers in the Western Balkans (see paragraph 19 for

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complete statement). In the statement, the Ministers agreed to support the establishment of three regional centers: 1) the Peace Support Operations Training Center in Sarajevo, Bosnia; 2) the Media Training Center in Skopje, Macedonia; and 3) the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defense Center in Krusevac, Serbia.

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Bilateral with Bosnia's Defense Minister  
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17. (C) The MAP issue dominated the conversation, with MoD Cikotic insisting that Bosnia should be granted MAP at the December NATO Ministerial, as this would be the only way to support the elements in Bosnia that support reform and repudiate those who seek to undermine reform efforts and weaken the unity of the Bosnian state. Cikotic also argued that the current budget is drafted with MAP programs in mind and that the MOD could lose those funds if Bosnia were not granted MAP. ASD Vershbow explained that granting MAP to Bosnia in the absence of any progress on reform would be viewed in Washington as letting intransigent politicians who block reform but seek rewards such as MAP off the hook. Vershbow stressed that even if Bosnia does not get MAP in December, the Allies must work together to make it clear that MAP for Bosnia is not a matter of "whether" but "when".

18. (C) ASD Vershbow noted U.S. disappointment with the Bosnian Serbs' resistance to accepting Turkey's no-cost offer to support a Bosnian deployment to Afghanistan. MoD Cikotic was optimistic that a BiH deployment to Afghanistan would be approved. He agreed that Turkey had presented the most attractive offer, which might still be approved, but that a deployment with Germany or the UK may be selected instead. Cikotic stated that the Iraq deployments had been extremely valuable for Bosnian troops and that such deployments always received far more volunteers than were needed.

19. (C) Cikotic and Vershbow also discussed the 2,700 soldiers that are slated to be released from the Bosnian armed forces due to age. Cikotic stated that some of the soldiers would be staying on to train new recruits, and that programs for re-employment were being put in place for

others. Norway has committed 1 million KM to a re-employment fund, and Cikotic sent a letter to the NATO Secretary General to establish a trust fund that would also support reintegration of dismissed soldiers. Cikotic requested U.S. support for the fund, stating that even if the financial contribution were nominal, the act of U.S. support in itself would be valuable. Cikotic stated that, before the end of November, he would be submitting a proposed agreement to resolve the immovable defense property issues.

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Bilateral with Serbian Defense Minister Sutanovac  
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¶10. (C) ASD Vershbow praised Serbia's participation in SEDM and as an observer in the A5; stressing that Serbia's participation in such regional initiatives would promote a Europe whole, free and at peace. MoD Sutanovac thanked Vershbow for U.S. support of Serbia's SEDM membership and reiterated that Serbia wished to be a part of all regional activities; such activities would be incomplete without Serbian participation, he said.

¶11. (C) MoD Sutanovac stated that he expected Serbia's NATO liaison office in Brussels to open by the end of the year, as a representative has already been nominated and is awaiting confirmation. Sutanovac explained that 2009 is the 10th anniversary of NATO air strikes in Serbia and that, against this backdrop, the 27-percent support for NATO among Serbia's public (higher than in the Ukraine, he noted) is an encouraging figure. MoD Sutanovac also noted that Serbian troops are now serving in PKO operations in four countries. He stated that 21 medical team members were sent to Chad with Norway and that Serbia is examining the possibility of sending a contingent with Spain to Lebanon. He added that IMET, as well as the cooperation with the Ohio National Guard, were critical to Serbia.

¶12. (C) MoD Sutanovac argued that while cooperation on Kosovo was successful at the working level, the effort on public outreach has not been sufficient. He lamented that the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) had been formed by the

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international community without alerting the Serbian government, which could have helped manage public reaction by promoting it as a numerical reduction from the Kosovo Protection Force rather than the formation of a new military entity. He also suggested that training for the KSF could have been done by a small NATO nation such as Latvia or Estonia to improve public perception.

¶13. (C) MoD Sutanovac stated that he planned to raise changes to the 1999 Military-Technical Agreement (MTA) with NATO Secretary General Rasmussen during the latter's yet-to-be-scheduled visit to Serbia in the coming year. Sutanovac insisted that a relaxation of the MTA ground and air safety zones was necessary, as the restrictions were no longer needed and served only to reinforce the perception that Serbia was not to be trusted despite having displayed only positive behavior. MoD Sutanovac also lamented that Serbia's president and MoD were forced to request clearance to enter Serbian territory in an area where Serbian military presence had been requested by KFOR. ASD Vershbow assured Sutanovac that KSF training would be transparent and stated that, while he understood the frustration on the MTA, the agreement cannot simply be erased in one stroke. Vershbow stressed that Serbia must present to NATO a concrete, modest proposal on the specific MTA changes it sought.

¶14. (C) Sutanovac lamented that the U.S. had not sent 5th Generation fighters as requested for the Air Show held in Serbia this year. He noted that 15 countries provided equipment and that, had Russia sent some of its newest planes, it would have looked extremely bad for the U.S. The U.S. sent a C-130J and a General Officer in support.

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¶15. (C) Croatian State Secretary Pjer Simunovic reported that Croatia is updating its Strategic Defense Review to reflect the country's entry into NATO and the MOD has produced a first draft of the National Security Strategy. Simunovic explained that the economic crisis has caused the MOD to extend its long-term development plans over a longer period of time, but all of the planned projects have been kept, including Armored Personnel Carriers (APC)s, Coast Guard equipment and the U.S. offer of F-16s.

¶16. (C) Simunovic confirmed that Croatia is reconfiguring its contribution in Afghanistan. Croatia will increase its force levels by five percent and stand up two police OMLTs, one of which will be a combined deployment with the Minnesota National Guard. Simunovic requested the U.S. provide thirteen additional HMMVs to increase the safety of Croatia's armed forces. ASD Vershbow welcomed the news of Croatia's contribution of two police OMLTs, noting that this is in line with the increased focus on training Afghan security forces.

¶17. (C) ASD Vershbow shared his views on the Western Balkans, noting that while the U.S. would like to see a more constructive stance on Kosovo, trends in Serbia are encouraging. Simunovic reported that Croatia has good defense relations with Serbia and would host a visit of the Serbian Minister of Defense in Zagreb the following week.

¶18. (C) Vershbow reported that efforts to use support of Bosnia's NATO MAP application as leverage for political reform (the Butmir process) were not making progress. Simunovic argued that Bosnia should be granted MAP in December even though Allies know the country is not ready. He said this would show support for forward-looking Bosnians, acknowledge the progress made in defense reform, and help sustain positive momentum. Vershbow confirmed that the U.S. decision was not based on concern for the implications for Ukraine's and Georgia's membership prospects, noting the U.S. position that there are multiple paths to membership. He explained that the U.S. view on MAP for Bosnia comes down to a consideration of what is the best way to encourage reform and not let the political leadership off the hook. Vershbow noted that the U.S. is worried about how the state will continue functioning once the OHR shuts down. He stressed the importance of Croatia giving unequivocal signals to Bosnian Croats that they have no prospect of rejoining Croatia.

¶19. (U) Joint Statement on enhancing regional cooperation through regional centres in the Western Balkans. We, the ministers of defence of the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and

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Herzegovina, Republic of Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Republic of Serbia and Republic of Slovenia are committed to promoting and deepening regional cooperation among our countries in the spirit of good neighbourly relations, confidence building, intensified cooperation and regular exchange of information in the field of Defence Reforms and best practices. In addition to existing regional cooperation, in recent years we have been strengthening and deepening a pragmatic approach to regional cooperation in the field of common and comparable Defence Reforms challenges in the Southeast Europe region. A pragmatic mechanism, the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse has been established by all Countries in the region. It is a flexible, practical and useful tool devoted to Defence Reforms and issues - regular exchange of information, specific Defence Reform projects and common regional challenges.

In 2007 the regular meetings were upgraded with the first Southeast Europe Regional Defence Policy Directors meeting in the Western Balkans format. Since then it became an independent and permanent regional defence forum, which in

June 2008 resulted in an informal Defence Ministers meeting in the Western Balkans format. Support for regular Ministerial Meetings and development of pragmatic regional cooperation in this format was expressed by all participants.

We, the Ministers of Defence therefore agree that SEE Defence Ministers Meetings, directors meetings as well as regular expert meetings are important forums for promoting and developing regional cooperation, exchanging best practices, achieving high professional standards and should be continued in the future. Combined, these events present an important step forward and a solid platform towards increased comprehensive and transparent Defence and Security dialogue, positive development and confidence building in the region.

We agree that regional approach to some common challenges is a rational and practical method of cooperation, which also gives an opportunity for cooperation on specific education and training issues, including with a view on possible cooperation in the field of international operations in the future. One of the key objectives of regional cooperation is synchronization of valuable resources, experiences and knowledge, therefore an integrated concept offers an added value and mutual benefits to our common efforts. Thus we have agreed to collectively support the idea of establishing three regional centres with the highest level of common interest to be developed and used by all countries in the region, namely:

1. Peace Support Operations Training Centre in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
2. Media Training Centre in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia,
3. Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defence Centre in Krusevac, Republic of Serbia.

In the process of establishing these three regional projects the following agreed criteria for a true regional centres shall be considered:

- options for collective budgeting, management and use,
- options for collective planning and realization of training and education,
- participation of countries from the region,
- other aspects.

Work should also continue on examining possibilities in other areas of cooperation and possible establishment of additional regional centres.

In this regard we fully encourage close cooperation on these issues. All possibilities and venues will be explored through continuous contacts at the working, expert and decision-making levels. Working groups for each Centre shall be established by the Country leading the effort and other interested Countries from the region and wider. Evaluation, plans and specific proposals shall be provided by the Working Groups and processed at the Policy Directors level for further consideration by the Defence Ministers.

Joint cooperation is vital since these centres would address common capability requirements and related goals. We should also join our efforts to promote these centres outside the region and achieve their recognition on the principles of expertise and standards of excellence.

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We have already outlined and will also continue to support regional cooperation in other fields of common interest where the willingness and interest will be expressed by partner countries. Dialogue on these issues will continue at all levels.

We task the respective Defence Policy Directors to work on the implementation of the above proposals and issues upon the evaluation and recommendation of the relevant experts.

120. (U) Assistant Secretary Vershbow cleared this cable.  
MOORE